CMEA Bay Section
October 31, 2026

Beginning Clarinet
... AND BEYOND!

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Recommended Clarinet & Mouthpiece Brands	**Highly Recommended Brands** ($400-1300) ● Yamaha ● Buffet ● Vito (old-school) ● Selmer (old-school) ● Jupiter (old-school) ● Backun **Brands to Avoid** (Less than $200) ● Mendini ● Cecilio ● Jean Paul ● Glory ● Eastrock **Recommended Mouthpieces** ● Yamaha 4C - $50 ● J&D Hite - $33 ● Clark Fobes - *Debut* - $36 ● Vandoren - Intermediate/Advance - $165+ ○ M15 - Nice centered tone (med tip opening) ○ M30 - Darker tone, lower overtones (wide tip opening) ○ M13 - Brighter tone, higher overtones (narrow tip opening ○ BD4 - warm, compact sound ○ BD5 - high projection, warm core, high-note friendly **Avoid** ● Clarinet mouthpieces without brands ○ Just a blank mouthpiece. They're not

	shaped for Rico or Vandoren reeds, so they will be difficult to play **What if you can't afford nicer clarinets for your music program?** ● Donors Choose ● Facebook Marketplace ● Craigslist ● Ebay ● **Last resort -** If you can, upgrade the set up of the "ISO" (Instrument Shaped Object)
Setting Up The Mouth Piece	**Step 1** ● Open a reed package and put the tip of the reed to up to half of the reed into your mouth for 10 seconds **Step 2** ● Take out the mouthpiece (remove ligature) ● Place the reed on to the mouthpiece ○ Flat on flat, curve on curve ○ Just see a little bit of black at the tip of the mouthpiece ○ If you can see the inside of the mouthpiece from the tip, the reed is too low ○ **NEVER** touch the tip of the reed when adjusting placement; always adjust with the sides and the heel **Step 3** ● Take the ligature and place the wider side of the ligature over top of the mouthpiece ● The ligature should be placed just under the back slope of the mouthpiece

	○ Sometimes mouthpieces have a line the ligature should line up with ○ Screws ALWAYS shoot to the right. With a standard student ligature, the gap of the ligature will be over the center of the reed
Embouchure	**Outer Embouchure** ● "OU" shape. The mouth is a ring-muscle, all muscles of the mouth should be engaged ○ "Milkshake" ○ Sucking on thumb exercise ■ Have students wash hands before and after ○ Advance upper lip tests ■ Teach grabs clarinet from the barrel while the clarinet is in the students mouth and wiggle it to see if it just falls out ■ Pencil test - push eraser of pencil up against the upper lip of the clarinet while the clarinet is in their mouth and they're forming an embouchure **Inner Embouchure** ● "EE" - Tongue should always be floating in the middle of the mouth while playing ○ Need to constantly remind beginning students until it's second nature (6-12 months) **All-together - "ME** (Tongue)**, TOO!** (mouthshape)**"**
Blowing On The Mouthpiece	● Top teeth make contact with the top of the mouthpiece ○ Highly recommend mouthpiece patches! ■ Cheap 160 Pack ■ High quality 5 pack

	● Bottom lip slightly comes in the cover bottom teeth (whole bottom lip **should not** disappear) ● "ME, TOO!" - Blow!
Setting Up The Instrument	● Build bottom up in first lesson of setting up, after that students can build as they please ● **WARNING -** watch out when putting together the upper and lower joints ○ When joining the two joints together, press down the "D" key of the upper joint to lift the bridge key ○ Do small twists/wiggles to join the joints. If you twist completely around, you will crash and possible bend pinky keys ● After the first lesson of setting up, recommend to students to start with putting the **reed in** their **mouth while** they **set up** to **be** more **efficient** with time ● You know the **clarinet is aligned properly** if the thumb rest lines up with "the face/Squidward's house", and the reed
Hand Position	**Right Hand** ● The thumb rest sits on the right thumb between the nail and the wrinkly part ○ Sometimes there are outliers with longer thumbs ● Fingers float closely over holes, pinky over top pinky keys (don't let them curl or go under the clarinet) ● Fingers should be parallel to ground like "lines on paper" **Left Hand** ● Natural hand position, will be at an angle ○ Stick out left hand, you're a zombie ○ Keep relaxed hand position and bring it to

	the clarinet ○ Left pointer finger be touching or floating over throat-tone Ab key, throat-tone A key, and the first top hole of the upper joint (F# finger) ○ Thumb is floating over thumb hole (F fingering) **Thumb Cushions** Right thumb hurts? Thumb cushions ● Silicone thumb cushions **Other Notes** ● "Tiger Claw" vs Flat fingers ○ Flat fingers cover holes! ○ Press over holes hard and see where the circle imprints are. ■ They should be in the center of the finger prints, not the tips of the sides
First Notes	● Recommend to start with E, F, and G ○ Notes are in the staff ○ Less finger coordination ● Then go to E, D, C ● Next notes: ○ Throat-tone A (use side of pointer finger to rock back and forth) ○ Low B with middle finger ○ Throat tone Bb ○ Go down to low A and G ● C Major broken scale ○ Don't recommend C Major going "over the break" until students learn how to go over the break properly ● Exercises using low Bb, low A, low G, and low F to go over the break

	● C Major scale that goes over the break ○ It is difficult for beginning clarinet players to transition from throat-tone A to clarion/“Long B”. Remind students to keep fingers close to keys ■ If delay, “let your thumb lead the way”
Tonguing	**“Tip of the Tongue to the Tip of the Reed”** ● Have students lick the top flat part of the reed, not the literal tip ● Have students touch the backside of their top teeth, then say “TEE” ● Have students touch the gums above the backside of their top teeth, then say “TEE” ○ This is roughly where the tip of the reed will be when their mouthpiece is in their mouth ● Have students play 4 quarter notes with constant air flow ○ “Snake” or “Around the World” exercise This is important to cover to avoid students who do “anchor tonguing” (using the middle of the to the reed or the roof of the mouth to separate notes)
Going Over “The Break”	**How to start?** ● Exercises using low Bb, low A, low G, and low F to go over the break ● **Tradition of Excellence, Book 1** ○ Pg 27 #107 ○ Pg 28 #114
Reeds & Care	**Size Recommendation** ● At least 2.0 Rico reeds, ideally 1.5 to start ● Students can grow out of 1.5 in the first month or two

	Life span of a reed ● **Cane Reeds (Unrotated):** Last about 1 to 2 weeks (roughly 6 to 12 hours of playing) if you play on the same single reed continuously. ● **Cane Reeds (Rotated):** Last 3 to 4 weeks (or up to 15–30 playing hours) if you rotate a pack of 3 to 5 reeds so each one dries out completely between uses. ● **Synthetic Reeds:** Last **2 to 4 months** (roughly 80 to 150 playing hours) because plastic-composite materials resist moisture breakdown and physical warping. **How to identify the age of a reed** ● "New" - Can be bright or light yellow, not warped ● "Middle-Aged" - a more dull tan color, maybe a little warped ● "Time for the 'Wall Test'" - dark, probably chipped, black smudges, warped **Recommended Reed Brands** ● D'Addario **Rico** ● D'Addario **Rico *Royal*** - *about the same* ● **Vandoren** Traditional - Basic *Upgrade* ● **Vandoren V12** - *My preference* ● **Vandoren V21** - sweet sounding ● **Légère** - "Industry Leader" in synthetic reeds ○ Polypropylene **Reed Cases** ● Reed Guard - 2 ● Reed Guard - 4 ● Reed Case - 8 with humidifier **DO NOT LEAVE REEDS ON THE MOUTHPIECE AFTER PLAYING**

	FYI, Vandoren sizes their reeds a half size down ● Vandoren 2.0 = Rico 2.5
“STOP SQUEAKING!!”	**Instead,** say to yourself **“WHY are they squeaking?”** **Possible causes:** ● Too much mouthpiece ● Teeth on reed ● No mouthpiece patch ● Not pushing the mouthpiece upward to the top teeth ● Old reed ● Reed too soft (needs to level up) ● Accidentally bumping wrong keys ● Not switching fingers appropriately ● Tonguing too low on reed ● Tonguing too hard on reed ● Too much pressure on reed (embouchure problem)
Tuning the Clarinet	**What to expect:** ● They will be flat even if they’re pushed in all the way ● Tune band flat to the clarinets- better to be flat together! **How to improve tuning:** ● Embouchure reminder - “ME, TOO!” ● Harder reeds ● Over blowing makes clarinets go flat, playing softer raises the pitch ● Some “ISO’s” come with two barrels- one is shorter ● High note exercise to build awareness ○ High notes won’t come out if tongue is too low

	If tuning can be adjustable: ● Pull from the barrel to tune throat-tone area and high C (just above the staff) ● Pull from the middle to tube low C and clarion C
Picking Beginning Band Repertoire	**If you your clarinets don't know how to go over the break:** ● 6 note pieces ● Pieces that have notes stay below throat-tone Bb **Sample beginning band pieces** ● Cango Caves *by Ralph Ford* ● Star Wars *arranged by Carl Strommen* ● Shockwave *by Larry Clark* ● Early Bird March *by Mark Williams* ● Christmas Chimes/Carol of the Bells *arranged by John Kinyon* ○ Pass out only part 2, part 1 covered by flute part ● Pat-A-Pan Processional *arranged by John Kinyon* ○ Pass out only part 2, part 1 covered by flute part ● Countdown to Christmas *by Joseph Compello* ● Greensleeves *arranged by Michael Sweeney* ● Majestica *by Brian Balmages* ● Festival of the Eternal Lights *arranged by Clark Taylor* ● ALIEN INVASION *by David Gorham* ● Across the Serengeti *by Jack Wilds*
Bass Clarinet	**Who should move to bass clarinet?** ● Someone who can easily transport the bass clarinet back and forth the school ○ If they struggle with this, but you really want them on bass clarinet, offer a second

	one to stay at school so they can travel with just their mouthpiece ■ More of an issue with younger students ● Strong reader = strong bassline support ● Weak reader = more sustained and simple rhythms ● Someone who wants to do it **Technique that is different than Bb Soprano:** ● It uses plateau (covered) keys, so you don't need to worry about covering holes as much, ***except*** for the left hand point key- there is a little hole that needs to covered most of the time ● Tongue should be higher and more forward for upper register ● It is recommended to use right pinky fingering for clarion B and left pinky fingering for clarion C when first starting to go over the break ● **For advance playing,** altissimo fingerings are different
Questions & Playing Feedback	Open it up to the attendees